



Her Superior Intelligence

A COMEDY

By

Ema Suckow Hunting

MARCH BROTHERS
LEBANON, OHIO

TS 635
-29 H9485

Copyright, 1914
By March Brothers

SEP 28 1914

©CLD 38342

no 1

TMP 92-00917C

Her Superior Intelligence

CHARACTERS.

THE COLONEL.

DICK, his nephew.

MRS. MARCY, his housekeeper.

THE COLONEL is a man of forty, erect, soldierly and blustering, with a really imposing mustache and a martial air.

DICK is—young America at its average best.

MRS. MARCY wears the dress of a decorous, middle-aged, New England widow. At first glance, that is what she appears to be, but further scrutiny reveals the fact that she is distinctly good to look upon and that her face, when she wishes it, can be most subtle and expressive.

SETTING.

The comfortable library and living room of the Colonel's home in Massachusetts. There are two doors, one in the center of the back wall

leading into the entrance hall, the second at the right toward the back communicating with the interior of the house. To the right of the hall door is an open fireplace, and as the time is June, a jar of garden roses occupies the hearth. Beside it is a waste paper basket. There are books, a couch, a large table well down stage left, covered with a man's accumulation of objects—books, huge inkstand, pens, more books, a small revolving globe, a brass ash tray, a draughtsman's drawing board—the desk of a retired army engineer of studious habits. A large armchair stands at the farther side of this table, a smaller chair to the left. The extreme right of the stage, well down, is held by a small card table and two chairs, the housekeeper's low willow rocker, and a straight chair for the Colonel. There is a hat rack near the door.

TIME.

Towards eight o'clock of a June evening in the present—or any recent—year.

Her Superior Intelligence

[At the small table Mrs. Marcy and the Colonel are playing checkers. The game progresses slowly, the Colonel making his moves after mature deliberation, the housekeeper following swiftly and cleverly. Clearly, the man is getting the worst of it, although the woman holds a bit of crocheting in her hands and works calmly while he plans his moves. Finally the Colonel finds himself with two men and a king to but one king of his opponent. The Colonel moves; Mrs. Marcy quietly sweeps his men. The Colonel, tugging at his mustache, moves again. Mrs. Marcy coolly follows, penning him in. He starts, takes a long breath, frowns prodigiously, and sits glaring at the board. The curtains at the hall door are pulled aside, and Dick enters.]

DICK: Uncle, look here! I want to see you.

THE COLONEL *[lifting his hand without turning]*: Silence!

DICK: But, I say—I want to—

THE COLONEL: Silence, sir!

DICK: Oh, all right!

THE COLONEL: Read the papers, Dick—
read the papers.

[Dick, good natured again, comes behind Mrs. Marcy and looks across her shoulder at the game. The Colonel still glares and tugs at his mustache; the housekeeper crochets.]

DICK: What's the use, Colonel? Might as well give up—she's got you now no matter what you do. *[He strolls over to the big table and picks up a newspaper.]*

THE COLONEL *[withdrawing his hand as he is about to move]*: You are wrong. You are entirely and absolutely wrong.

[He looks again at the board. An expression of bewilderment crosses his face; he glances at the housekeeper. She crochets quietly, her

face blank. Still refusing to admit himself beaten, he rises and marches back and forth across the hearth rug. She turns and looks at him, meeting his eyes with a smile. He squares himself and prepares to take his medicine like a man. As he leans forward to make the fatal move, Dick interrupts.]

DICK: By Jove, those women ought to be exterminated!

THE COLONEL [*turning round, glad of the interruption*]: Those women?

DICK: English suffragettes. Of all the disgraceful, idiotic—why, just listen to this—

THE COLONEL: I refuse to listen.

DICK: You refuse—Why, great Scott, uncle, you don't mean to say that you uphold them?

THE COLONEL: I do not.

DICK: You do not?

8 HER SUPERIOR INTELLIGENCE.

THE COLONEL: I do not.

DICK: You do not what?

THE COLONEL: I do not—er—I do not refuse to listen!

DICK: Well, holy cats!

THE COLONEL: No, sir—I repeat, I do not refuse to listen. I believe in the freedom of the press as the great and fundamental bulwark of our nation, the cornerstone upon which our institutions are reared and flourish. You may deny it as you will—

DICK: But who's talking about the freedom of the press? It's the suffragettes that I'm objecting to. Why, they are going the limit over there! Just listen to this—

THE COLONEL: Stop, sir! I refuse to be a party to the scurrilous and absurd libels propagated and disseminated by the press of this country! Malicious distortions of the truth

and unscrupulous catering to the vicious tastes of the public have rendered our journals the laughing stock of the world!

DICK: But, look here! I thought you said—

THE COLONEL: I did not, sir. You are absolutely—in error. [*He takes a cigar from his pocket and bites off the end.*]

DICK: But about these suffragettes, uncle. Why, it's fierce! They go around burning and smashing and blowing things up, making spectacles of themselves and upsetting business conditions, and those guys over there can't do a thing with them. Put 'em in jail and they starve themselves; let them out and they get up a riot. Why, you can't approve of that sort of thing.

THE COLONEL: Absolutely.

DICK: What? You don't mean to tell me—

THE COLONEL: Absolutely. [*He has lit the cigar and puffs at intervals, making a face at*

each draw as the tobacco nips his tongue.] Woman is the natural, the predestined arbiter of the fate of mankind. Every quality of body and mind which she possesses fits her for that position. To the untrained intellect, it would seem at first glance that the superior muscular strength of the male gives him the advantage; but the conclusion is false, sir, on the face of it. What does society demand as civilization progresses? Immense muscular vitality, the brute strength to fell trees and propel watercraft? The crude energy necessary to win in hand-to-hand conflict with the forces of Nature or other brutes? Ridiculous, sir! Endurance—the peculiar quality of a woman's make-up; skill, diplomacy, shrewdness, tenacity of purpose which seems to yield but never breaks; imagination, insight, a marvelous appreciation of the peculiarities and weaknesses of others—these are the qualities, sir, which woman pre-eminently possesses and which our civilization demands!

DICK: Well! But that hasn't anything to do—

THE COLONEL: Incontestably, sir! Woman—the final and perfect creation of Omnipotence! To whom, sir, in moments of despair, of triumph, of defeat—from the cradle to the grave our inseparable companion, inspiration and guide!—I repeat, sir, to whom in moments of hesitation, of doubt—

[The Colonel's cigar has developed a long ash. He is holding it out at arm's length, vaguely feeling the need of an ash tray. Mrs. Marcy has risen quietly, crossed to the library table, and brought the tray unnoticed, standing just back and to one side of the speaker, holding it ready.]

—of need—to whom do we turn—

[His fingers encounter the tray. He turns, surprised. She looks at him quite without significance. He meekly deposits the ash.]

—ah—Mrs. Marcy, yes—yes, to be sure. Ahem!

[*Mrs. Marcy returns the tray to its place, goes back to her chair, and quietly resumes her crocheting.*]

DICK: That's all very well in general, but it doesn't touch the case of these crazy Englishwomen—though, by Jove, if I had to spend my days with the average Englishman, I'd kick, too. I don't know that I blame them.

THE COLONEL [*recovering himself*]: The attempted use of force by women is, as I was saying, entirely inexcusable.

DICK: But I thought—

THE COLONEL: Entirely! Her invincible weapon is, unquestionably, her superior intelligence. [*Mrs. Marcy lets her work fall to her lap; she listens intently, a peculiar smile on her lips.*] Man learns simply by experiment—woman knows by instinct. The woman who wins is invariably the woman who never bullies, coerces, drives, nags or pleads; she simply follows her intuition, arrives at a conclusion—and

waits for the man to catch up with her! [*He walks to the table, deposits the stub of his cigar in the tray, and resumes his pacing, entirely pleased with himself. Mrs. Marcy sits motionless, lost in thought. Dick stirs impatiently.*]

DICK: But all this talk about woman, lovely woman, God bless her! has nothing to do with the discussion.

THE COLONEL: On the contrary, it has everything to do—with the discussion.

DICK: Oh, prunes!

THE COLONEL: Have prunes anything to do with the discussion?

DICK [*enthusiastic again*]: No, not prunes—pecans!

THE COLONEL: Pecans?

DICK: You bet! Look here, uncle, for heaven's sake sit down. I want to talk to you,

and how can a fellow talk when you march up and down like an officer on parade?

THE COLONEL: If you have anything to say, Dick, the mere fact of my moving about from time to time can't inconvenience you.

MRS. MARCY [*resuming her crocheting and speaking without raising her eyes*]: Besides, the Colonel can't think except when he is on his legs.

THE COLONEL: C-can't think? In the name of reason, Mrs. Marcy, what have my legs to do with my brains? [*He marches over to his chair and plants himself firmly upon it.*] Now, sir, whatever it is, say it distinctly and don't mince matters. You can't be suspended again now that you have, by the mercy of God, graduated. What is it?

DICK: It's not a scrape, uncle, on the dead. It's just—

MRS. MARCY [*half rising*]: Shall I go, Mr. Dick?

THE COLONEL: Keep your seat, ma'am, keep your seat!

DICK: No, don't go; I may need you—again. [*He winks at her, but she resumes her seat and her work, unmoved.*] It's just this, uncle—I've got the greatest thing in the world right by the tail! It's the one chance left in this country for a young chap with only a little capital and some muscles on his bones. Why, that country down there is immense. There isn't a thing the matter with it, and the few things that are the matter with it are all advantages. Why, I can show you how in three years a fellow can pay for his land and improvements, have money in the bank and a cracking good little income besides, and all the time—What's the matter?

THE COLONEL: What under the canopy are you talking about, young man?

DICK: Why, this land, this proposition—

THE COLONEL [*roaring*]: What land? What proposition?

DICK: Well, keep your shirt on—I beg your pardon! I mean—look here, uncle, you’ve been bully to me ever since I was a little shaver—yes, you have now—you can’t deny *that!* You and Mrs. Marcy between you have brought me up, and nobody can tell me it was any cinch. And you’ve sent me to college and somehow or other I’ve gotten through with a degree—

THE COLONEL: A very small degree of honor, sir!

DICK: Oh, I don’t know! That depends on how you look at it. I carried off a few blue ribbons in football, didn’t I?

THE COLONEL [*snorting*]: Football! An affair of biceps, not brains!

DICK [*eagerly*]: That’s it—that’s what I mean. Biceps—muscles—that’s what I’ve got; and the brains to use them. Well, now, see here. I know what you want me to do—what you’ve always planned I should do; finish college, then go to Tech, then take the position you could

swing for me as army engineer and make the same kind of a rep that you made. Well—

THE COLONEL: Well?

DICK: Well—I can't do it.

THE COLONEL: You can't—What do you mean, sir?

DICK: I mean—that I'm not made for it; I'm not that kind—I couldn't built a fortification in a thousand years—I—why, I'd be a dub at that sort of thing! I haven't any head for mathematics, uncle—I can't keep my accounts straight!

THE COLONEL: I should say you can't!

DICK: Well—there you are! I'm sorry. I've gone along thinking I could do it when the time came and pull through somehow so you wouldn't be ashamed of me. I knew you had your heart set on my going into the government service and making a name for myself as you did, and I'd a heap rather take my medicine than disappoint you.

THE COLONEL: Nonsense, sir!

DICK: Yes, I would—if I wasn't sure I'd disappoint you anyhow and a lot worse if I went into the thing and then fizzled out.

THE COLONEL: Then why the blazes fizzle out? I beg your pardon, ma'am! When I was your age, sir, young men took a different tone in speaking of their future careers!

DICK: But don't you see—

THE COLONEL: *Of course* I see! It's the spirit of the age, sir, the miserable, grasping, money-getting spirit, that is not content with work and fame and the service of the commonwealth, but must pile up for itself a fortune to waste in extravagance and fool philanthropy! The spirit that scorns the government service, sir, and raises the flag of personal gain in place of the Stars and Stripes!

DICK: But—

THE COLONEL: Be silent, sir! A pretty pass our nation has reached when its young men despise its service and—

MRS. MARCY: And besides, Dick, you can't expect a man who has made an honorable career for himself in one line to realize that there are honorable careers to be made in other lines.

THE COLONEL: What—what's that, Mrs. Marcy? Do you mean to tell me that I am a narrow, bigoted, set-in-his-tracks old idiot who can't see more than one thing at a time?

MRS. MARCY: And besides, you can't blame your uncle for forgetting that you are not his own son and that it isn't your fault if you are not exactly like him.

THE COLONEL: Exactly like me—like *me*? Good Lord, I should hope not, ma'am.

MRS. MARCY: And so, Dick, you mustn't ever expect that your uncle will consent to your choosing your work in the world—as he chose his.

[*Silence. Mrs. Marcy placidly crochets; the Colonel stares at her. Wrath, disappointment, bewilderment, struggle in his face; but at last contrariness wins. With the air of disdain-
ing to answer so womanish a speech, the Colonel folds his arms, and glares at his nephew.*]

THE COLONEL: Well, sir, how much longer are you going to keep us waiting? Why don't you tell us about this land? Where is it?

DICK: In Florida. I tell you, uncle, it's the biggest thing on earth! You can raise anything there.

THE COLONEL: Florida?

DICK: Florida—sure.

THE COLONEL: You can raise malaria and niggers there—that's what you can raise.

DICK: Ah—that's just it! Why can you raise malaria? Because there are swamps.

THE COLONEL: You know there are!

DICK: Well, then, steer clear of the swamps and buy hammock land.

THE COLONEL: Hammock land?

DICK: Yes—high hammock land.

THE COLONEL: Hammock land! Well, that explains it. I wondered why those Southerners were so danged lazy. Hammock land!

DICK: Oh, you don't understand! Hammock land is high, rolling land covered with a growth of hard wood.

THE COLONEL: What do you want to do on it—roll?

DICK: No—farm.

THE COLONEL: Farm—in the woods?

DICK: Well, not exactly farm. I want to raise nuts.

[Mrs. Marcy, smiling to see the two deep in talk, glances at the clock, folds away her work and leaves the room by the door on the right.]

THE COLONEL: Nuts? Shucks!

DICK: Pecans—paper-shelled pecans.

THE COLONEL: Paper-shelled? Well, what you going to do with them—feed them to the squirrels in the hard wood trees?

DICK: Not much. I'm going to sell 'em. And that's another thing—the timber alone on that land is worth the price of it. The first thing I'm going to do is to cut it all off.

THE COLONEL: And set out the nuts around the stumps?

DICK: I should say not! Why, those stumps alone will bring me in enough to pay for clearing the land.

THE COLONEL: The stumps? Come off!

DICK: Sure. I'll sell 'em to a turpentine company. Why, I'll bet you those stumps are worth ten dollars apiece!

THE COLONEL: Then why don't you raise stumps?

DICK: Then of course I'll have to break the land and put in fertilizer; and that's where the niggers come in handy.

THE COLONEL: Well, it's the only thing I ever heard of that niggers were good for!

DICK: You don't understand, uncle! I'll get a nigger or two to break the land, see? And then plant cow peas and sweet potatoes—

THE COLONEL: But how about the fertilizer?

DICK: The sweet potatoes and peas are the fertilizer.

THE COLONEL: Great heavens! Do you mean to tell me that I ate fertilizer for my dinner to-night?

DICK: No, no, no—listen! You plant the sweet potatoes and the cow peas. Then you take off the first crop. Then the vines, see? you plow under, and they put into the land just what it lacks, and—there you are! Why, that first crop alone will keep a chap the first year!

THE COLONEL: Who told you so?

DICK: All the land agents. Then the next fall you set out your shoots, forty feet apart.

THE COLONEL: Shoots?

DICK: Pecan trees—'bout three feet high.

THE COLONEL: You set out pecan shoots, three feet high, forty feet apart? How much land you going to have?

DICK: Oh—not much. Forty acres. You see, these pecan trees grow to be immense. Why, in ten years two of 'em will almost meet across that forty feet.

THE COLONEL: Ten years? Can't you get a crop for ten years?

DICK: No, of course not. You've got to give the trees time to grow. But that's the beauty of that country. Instead of starving around for ten years waiting for something to bring you in the cash, what do you think you do?

THE COLONEL: Starve the first year.

DICK: Not much! You plant orange trees.

THE COLONEL: Orange trees? Where?

DICK: Between the pecan trees. Why, I bet you that five years before the pecans are ready to bear I'll have an income of—

THE COLONEL [*getting interested*]: Hold on, now! Don't the orange trees have to grow?

DICK: Sure they do—can't get a crop for four years.

THE COLONEL: Then you've still got time to starve.

DICK: Huh—that's all you know about it. Look here—what do you think you put between the orange trees?

THE COLONEL: Between the—Look here, boy, if you're stringing me—

DICK [*excited, moving objects about on the desk to illustrate*]: Stringing your grandmother! See here—here are the pecans, forty feet apart; here is an orange tree set right between them; now, you can't waste all that land around the trees. What would you raise there?

THE COLONEL [*vaguely*]: Why, er—er—chickens?

DICK: By Jove, uncle, you've hit it the first shot!

THE COLONEL: What? Do you mean to tell me that you are actually going to raise *chickens*?

DICK: You bet your sweet life I am! Why, look here—why don't chickens lay in the win-

ter? Too cold. Why are eggs high in the winter? No eggs. Answer—Take your chickens south and *have* eggs in the winter. Second point—What makes chicken raising expensive? Coops for food. Answer—Let the chickens roost in the trees and scratch for their food. Third point—What is the best food for chickens? Bugs. What is the worst enemy of orchards? Bugs. Answer—Let the chickens eat the bugs. Why, I bet you that one hen alone will keep me in sox and tobacco for ten years! And that isn't all.

THE COLONEL: It's too much—for me!

DICK: Here's say twenty acres of ground set out in trees. We'll give the chickens ten acres. That leaves ten acres; and on those ten acres we'll raise—

THE COLONEL: Careful now—

DICK: Violets!

THE COLONEL: *What? Ten acres of violets?*

DICK: Sure! Violets need the shade. There you have your trees making it shadier every year—

THE COLONEL: But what the blazes will you *do* with the violets?

DICK: Take 'em to Palm Beach and sell 'em to the nabobs!

THE COLONEL [*collapsing*]: You've got me, Dick—you've got me!

DICK [*rising with the air of having Florida in his side pocket*]: Oh, I knew you'd see it, uncle. It's a great country—a great little country, believe me!

THE COLONEL [*recovering*]: Dick!

DICK: Yes, sir?

THE COLONEL: Just what do you want to do?

DICK [*seriously*]: I want to go down there this fall and try my luck, uncle. I haven't any head for engineering—I'm sorry, but I haven't;

and business—stroking down the rich guys with one hand and squeezing the poor ones with the other—I'd last about two weeks at that. But I know I can make things grow; and I love the out of doors and a soft shirt and looking every man right straight between the eyes and not owing him a cent or a favor! So what I want is this, uncle—lend me two thousand dollars at six per cent. for five years, and I'll go down there and make good.

THE COLONEL [*rising and holding out his hand*]: All right, Dick—I'll do it.

DICK: You'll—y-y-you'll do it—

THE COLONEL: You heard me, sir. I hope you don't dispute my word?

DICK: But there's one thing—there's one thing, uncle, before we make the bargain.

THE COLONEL: What's this—what's this?

DICK: I won't go and leave you alone.

30 HER SUPERIOR INTELLIGENCE.

THE COLONEL: You won't go and—You'll do what I tell you to!

DICK: I won't go and leave you alone!

THE COLONEL: What the blazes—You don't mean to tell me—*me*—to go down there and gather the eggs?

DICK: No, sir—I want you to get married.

THE COLONEL: Married—married, sir? Do you dare look me in the eye and say *married*?

DICK: Sure—if you can find any one to have you. [*Speechless, the Colonel drops back into his chair, breathing hard and glaring into space.*] Why, look here, uncle, it's the sanest thing in the world. Here am I wanting to go off and make my way as a fellow ought to do; and here are you with your fortune made and a pretty blame good one, too, not too old to marry, but too old to want to go into a raw country; comfortable home, old friends living around, congenial work getting out your book—it would

be a crime to drag you down there. On the other hand, I just simply won't go and leave you alone; but if you were married—Why, look here, uncle, there would be a dozen women tickled to death to marry you—and think what a relief it would be to me!

THE COLONEL: And think what a picnic it would be for me—married to a dozen women!

DICK: Oh, prunes! You know what I mean. Why, I don't understand it. Here you are, perfectly willing to lend me two thousand dollars, and yet you won't do me a little favor like getting married!

[*Mrs. Marcy enters in time to hear the last words. She carries a handsome silver coffee tray on which is a coffee pot, three cups and saucers, cream, sugar and a plate of small cakes.*]

MRS. MARCY [*pausing*]: Getting married? Who's talking of getting married?

DICK: I am, Mrs. Marcy.

32 HER SUPERIOR INTELLIGENCE.

MRS. MARCY: You are, Mr. Dick? I'm so glad! Who is she?

DICK [*taking the tray*]: Oh, no, no—no, you don't understand. I'm talking of it, but it is the Colonel who is going to be married.

MRS. MARCY: The Colonel—going to be—married?

THE COLONEL: No, no—Dick, hold your tongue, sir! I married! The idea is preposterous!

DICK: It's like this, Mrs. Marcy—Uncle has been the best old sport in the world and promised I shall go south and get my start; but how the dickens can I go off and leave him alone **up** here in Massachusetts? I say the thing for him to do—the only fair thing toward me—is to get married.

MRS. MARCY: Oh! So the idea is yours, Dick? [*She comes slowly down to the small table.*]

DICK: Sure. But you can see how sensible it is, can't you?

THE COLONEL: Preposterous!

MRS. MARCY [*taking up the checker board and carrying it to the large table*]: No—I can't say I do, Mr. Dick. [*She puts the board down by the Colonel's elbow.*] I agree with the Colonel—the idea is preposterous.

THE COLONEL [*bridling*]: Eh?

DICK: But look here—

MRS. MARCY [*returning to her tray and setting out the cups, etc.*]: Quite preposterous! Quite! A man of the Colonel's age—

DICK: Why, he's just barely forty, and lots of old chaps—

THE COLONEL [*preening his mustache*]: It is true, ma'am, that I have, thank God, passed safely through the period of youthful lunacy; but I flatter myself that I am not as yet—er—obsolete.

34 HER SUPERIOR INTELLIGENCE.

MRS. MARCY: Oh, in years, Colonel! I meant in experience, in gravity—

THE COLONEL: Ahem!

MRS. MARCY: A man of your standing, even fame—

THE COLONEL: Ahem!

MRS. MARCY: Your knowledge of the world—

THE COLONEL: A—a—hem!

MRS. MARCY: Your intellectual brilliancy—

THE COLONEL: A—a—*hem!*

MRS. MARCY [*softly*]: Surely you can't care for—love—and such—foolishness?

THE COLONEL: No, no—ahem!—by no means—I—I—ahem!

DICK: Such foolishness! Do you think love is foolishness?

MRS. MARCY [*turning suddenly to the Colonel*]: Do you?

THE COLONEL: I—I? Ahem! Er—certainly, certainly, madame! [*He blows his nose violently.*]

MRS. MARCY [*going back to the coffee*]: Ah! You see, Mr. Dick, I was right.

THE COLONEL: At the same time—at the same time, ma'am, I consider it every man's duty to marry.

[*Dick starts forward with an exclamation; Mrs. Marcy, with a touch on his arm, restrains him. He looks at her, puzzled, and she lays a finger on her lips. A light breaks upon him; his lips pucker in a noiseless whistle and he bolts to the back of the room, where he stands with his back to the others.*]

THE COLONEL [*unconscious of this byplay, continuing to orate*]: His duty, ma'am—most emphatically! However much he may be—er—

personally inconvenienced; however much he may prefer—er—peace, ma'am—peace and comfort—

MRS. MARCY: But surely, Colonel, for the sake of a mere duty you would not sacrifice your peace and comfort?

THE COLONEL [*with mild condescension*]: You forget, ma'am, it would not be necessary to sacrifice peace and comfort, but rather to augment it, ma'am, as it were—ahem!—augment it!—if one found the right woman.

MRS. MARCY: Oh, yes—the right woman! [*His coffee is ready. She has been particular about the exact amount of cream and sugar. She takes up the cup now and carries it around the table to him, looking him smilingly in the eyes as she holds it out.*] But where will you find the right woman, Colonel?

THE COLONEL [*sadly*]: Ah, yes—where? Where, indeed?

[*He takes the cup from her hand, sets it on the table beside him, and absentmindedly stirs the coffee, looking straight ahead. She lingers a moment, then goes back to the small table.*]

DICK [*coming forward*]: Well, it's a cinch you'll never find her by staring straight ahead of you! Look around, man—look around!

THE COLONEL [*starting*]: Eh?

MRS. MARCY [*hastily*]: Your coffee, Mr. Dick?

THE COLONEL [*rousing himself and taking a sip of the coffee*]: Ah, yes—look around! I've been looking around, my boy, for twenty years.

DICK: Twenty years?

THE COLONEL: I—I must confess, Dick, this—marrying idea—ahem!—is not entirely new to me. I have—considered it, considered it.

DICK: Is that right, uncle?

THE COLONEL: In fact, at one time I—but she was quite right, quite right. She was unquestionably *not* the right woman. Ah—just a drop more of that coffee, Mrs. Marcy, if you please.

[*Mrs. Marcy takes up the coffee pot and comes to fill his cup.*]

DICK: Well! That hasn't anything to do with trying to find the right woman now.

THE COLONEL: There is where you are mistaken. There is an obstacle, sir—I may say an insuperable obstacle. I may even say, without exaggeration, a prohibitive obstacle.

[*Mrs. Marcy, having poured his coffee, stands behind him, forgetting to bring the cream and sugar.*]

DICK: An obstacle? You're joking!

THE COLONEL: Huh! Do you consider my name, sir, a joke?

DICK: Your name?

THE COLONEL: My name! Will you kindly consider for a moment what my name is? In the first place, my given name. What is it?

DICK: You know as well as I do—Percival.

THE COLONEL: Percival—*Percival!* For me—*me!* “Percy!” Did you ever, sir, encounter a cognomen so—idiotically and reprehensibly *preposterous*—as Percival for me?

DICK: Well, I—really, uncle, I never considered it.

THE COLONEL: Ah! Well, I have! [*He rises and begins his march across the hearth rug, tugging at his mustache.*] Impossible to retain the name—equally impossible to dispense with a given name altogether. The result was the initial, P. And what, may I ask you, sir, is my surname?

DICK: Why—Nuttz.

THE COLONEL: Nuttz—exactly, sir! P. Nuttz! Peanuts! I repeat, sir, Peanuts! And when after arduous endeavors, I reached some eminence in my profession, they added insult to injury and gave me the title of Colonel. Colonel! *Colonel Nuttz!* Can you conceive, sir, of anything more outrageously and inordinately preposterous?

DICK: Colonel—Oh, I say! Colonel P. Nuttz! By Jove, I—Hahaha! [*He goes off into a roar of laughter.*] I beg your pardon, uncle, but really I never thought—Peanuts!

THE COLONEL: You see—exactly what I said—prohibitive, absolutely.

DICK [*controlling himself with difficulty*]: Oh, no, uncle, not prohibitive—just f-funny—[*Another roar.*]

THE COLONEL: The same thing—the same thing, in affairs of this sort. I may admit, sir, that I offered myself. She—laughed. “But think of my visiting cards!” she said. “Oh,

I could never do it. I should feel like the other half of a popcorn wagon!"

DICK: Well, but—

THE COLONEL: I tell you, sir, the obstacle is prohibitive. [*He strides back to his chair and takes up his cup. Mrs. Marcy brings the cream and sugar. He looks helplessly from his cup to the sugar bowl.*] Er—do I like one lump, ma'am, or two?

MRS. MARCY: Three.

[*He puts three lumps into the coffee, stirs it and tastes it. He nods with satisfaction, and Mrs. Marcy returns to her own coffee.*]

DICK: But, look here, uncle—surely there is some woman who knows you well, who is used to your name like me. Why, I never thought. I just thought—N-u-double t-z—why, that's nothing. Of course, some fool slip of a girl—girls are fools anyhow—but a woman, a woman with sense, who knows you, and knows your ways and your tastes—

THE COLONEL: Ah, my boy, there is just one woman in the world for me!

[Mrs. Marcy pauses with her coffee cup half way to her lips. Dick leans forward.]

DICK: You don't mean to tell me, uncle, that it is that—that popcorn girl?

THE COLONEL: Heaven forbid, sir. The woman has grown fat—unqualifiedly fat. I regard her decision as an escape.

DICK: But then—who is she?

THE COLONEL: Ah! I don't know.

DICK: You don't—say, what you giving me?

THE COLONEL: The truth. I do not know who she is, nor where she is. But somewhere, sometime, I shall see her—and I shall know her directly.

DICK: Well, that's too much for me.

THE COLONEL: I will explain. Directly after the—er—incident to which I referred—the escape, you understand—for the first and only time in my life I consulted a clairvoyant.

DICK: A clairvoyant?

THE COLONEL: Exactly—to ascertain my future, matrimonially.

DICK: Yes?

THE COLONEL: Yes. The clairvoyant went into a trance, consulted the spiritual voices, and gave me this assurance: “Your name is the key to the riddle of your fate. Find the woman whose name tallies with yours and you will find complete happiness.”

DICK: “Find the woman whose name tallies with yours?”

THE COLONEL: Exactly.

DICK: But what the dickens does that mean?

THE COLONEL: Tallies, sir—dovetails—fits in—completes it—belongs with mine! For example, if it were possible to find a lady whose name was—er—Brazil, I should know at once that her other name ought to be Nuttz!

DICK [*disgusted*]: Oh, piffle! Why don't you look for some one named Nigger Toe?

[*There is an interruption—a crash. Mrs. Marcy has dropped her empty cup and it has broken into a dozen pieces. She stoops hastily to gather them up.*]

DICK [*springing up*]: I say, Mrs. Marcy, you dropped your cup!

THE COLONEL [*also rising*]: You broke it!

MRS. MARCY [*on her knees*]: Really! And I hope I can break cups if I want to! Why do you stand and look at me?

DICK: But, look here—let me help—

MRS. MARCY: No, no, *no!* For goodness sake, go on!

DICK: Well!

THE COLONEL: There, there, my boy! Women get excited about little things like that—when you know them as well as I do, you will overlook such trifles.

DICK [*resuming his chair*]: She needn't bite my head off! But I say, this other half proposition. You have never found her—how do you know you ever will?

THE COLONEL: I don't know that I ever will.

DICK: Well, then:

THE COLONEL: But I know that I will never marry until I do! Now, don't argue with me, sir—not a word! A man's judgment in such cases goes for absolutely nothing; and I will never risk matrimony until led by a higher power!

DICK [*jumping up*]: Well, then, by Jove, uncle, if you won't marry until we find her, we've got to go and *find* her!

THE COLONEL: Go and find her? Preposterous!

DICK: Not at all! See here—you've lived here now, you and Mrs. Marcy and me, for ten years; you know every woman for miles around; have you found the right woman here?

THE COLONEL [*slowly*]: No, Dick—no, I can't say that I have.

[*Mrs. Marcy has carried the fragments of the cup to the waste paper basket, laying them in one at a time. At these words she suddenly rises, letting the remaining bits fall chinking from her apron.*]

DICK: Then it's pretty safe to infer that you never will find her here, isn't it?

THE COLONEL: Ah, Dick, I've come to infer that I'll never find her anywhere!

DICK: Nonsense! Why, we've got to find her—I need her in my business! And we will find her if we have to search every nook and cranny of the United States!

THE COLONEL: What do you mean, sir?

DICK: By Jove, uncle, that's the idea! Cinderella stunt, you know, only in place of a slipper we fit on a name! "Good morning, ma'am! Will you kindly tell me your name? Jones—Mary Jones? Ah—you won't do. Good bye!"

THE COLONEL: Have you suddenly taken leave of all rudiments of sense—

DICK: Oh, keep still, uncle, and go pack your bag! This is the greatest lark that ever came within a thousand miles of me! We'll go up and down this country, north, south, east and west; we'll interview every unmarried woman in forty 'leven states; we'll do cities, farms and villages; but by Jove—Mrs. Marcy, have I any clean collars—by Jove, if it takes a neck, we'll come back married!

[*He bolts through the door right; the Colonel follows and roars after him.*]

THE COLONEL: What do you mean, sir? Where are you going?

DICK: I'm going to pack! You hurry up, or we'll miss that 10:10 west. [*Exit.*]

THE COLONEL [*turning helplessly to Mrs. Marcy*]: What in the name of reason, ma'am, am I to do?

MRS. MARCY [*tartly*]: Why in the name of reason, sir, do you ask me?

THE COLONEL: Ah! I don't know!

MRS. MARCY [*coming down to small table and taking up her crocheting*]: Colonel, is your heart set on finding this—this woman—with the nuts in her name?

THE COLONEL: Madame!

MRS. MARCY: Oh, I know! But—you are sure there is a woman who—

THE COLONEL [*pacing his rug*]: Absolutely certain! It has been my inspiration for years. Somewhere, ma'am, a woman lives, so indubitably designed by the gods for me, that her very thoughts begin where mine leave off—

MRS. MARCY: And you—you want to find her? Aren't you—comfortable now?

THE COLONEL: Comfortable!

MRS. MARCY: Yes, yes, I know—suppose the wrong woman has the right name?

THE COLONEL: Impossible, my dear Mrs. Marcy! The name is to be merely the sign by which I shall recognize her whom I might otherwise unknowingly overlook.

MRS. MARCY: Oh! Colonel—are you very sure that you have—never seen—this woman? That she doesn't live around here—ten miles or so? Oh, it doesn't matter, only I thought if the—creature should happen to be—within reach—[*stepping back*]*—it would be foolish to go traipsing all over creation looking for her.*

THE COLONEL: Foolish, Mrs. Marcy?

MRS. MARCY [*resuming her chair*]: It's all very well for a young blood like Dick to go off half cocked looking for fate; but it's another thing for a man who has to have his chocolate at 7:37 precisely every morning—

THE COLONEL: I hope, ma'am—

MRS. MARCY: —and his shaving water just the temperature of his neck and his underwear patched on the *outside*—

THE COLONEL: I repeat, ma'am, I hope—

MRS. MARCY: Oh, I hope, too; but it's not very likely you can get baked beans for Sunday morning breakfast out in that new-fangled west among the cyclones and the suffragettes. Why, it's not safe for a man that doesn't even know how many lumps of sugar he takes in his coffee to travel around alone—

THE COLONEL: Mrs. Marcy—

MRS. MARCY: Just answer me one question, Colonel—who will you get to play checkers with you every evening after dinner and serve your coffee at eight o'clock sharp?

THE COLONEL: Will you let me speak, ma'am? I trust that however much I may value these—er—material comforts, they are not essential to my—And, besides, I shall be gone at most but a few months, and you will be here as usual when I—when we—return.

MRS. MARCY: Indeed I'll not!

THE COLONEL: What—

MRS. MARCY: Indeed I'll not be here! Not one hour after that—that woman enters this house!

THE COLONEL: Do you dare to imply, ma'am—

MRS. MARCY: Now, don't try to argue with me—

THE COLONEL: Argue? I command!

MRS. MARCY: Colonel—listen to me! The moment your wife enters this house I leave it—as housekeeper!

THE COLONEL [*exploding*]: Then I'll not go! I'll not go one step! I'm not going to have any danged woman coming in here and upsetting my arrangements! [*Strides to the door, shouts*]: Dick—Dick, you young jack-a-napes, come down here! [*Tramping about*]: Ridiculous—absurd—preposterous—

DICK [*bursting into room, overcoat on arm, bag, tennis racket, fishing rods, etc.*]: All ready—come on! Got your stuff packed?

THE COLONEL: I'm not going—I tell you I'm not going—not one step!

DICK [*dropping all his paraphernalia and shouting in the same key*]: Well, don't go!

THE COLONEL: What, sir? What—

DICK: I said—don't go! Stay right where you are!

THE COLONEL: Do you dare to dictate to me, sir? I'll go if I want to—

DICK: Not a step!

THE COLONEL: Out of my way, sir!

DICK: I tell you I won't go. If you're going to be so darned contrary—

THE COLONEL: Contrary? How dare you? I'll show you who runs this house—

MRS. MARCY [*quietly*]: Just a moment, please!

BOTH MEN: Eh?

MRS. MARCY: I think the Colonel is quite right. Of *course* he wants to go.

THE COLONEL [*dropping the hat he has snatched from the rack*]: Eh?

MRS. MARCY: He's tired of the humdrum life we lead here—every day just like every other day, books and work and checkers at night—he wants change, excitement—gaiety.

THE COLONEL: Gaiety?

DICK: But, my goodness, Mrs. Marcy—

MRS. MARCY: And of course he is impatient to find his bride—to have a gay young woman in the house, who will fill these quiet rooms with song and laughter—

THE COLONEL: Laughter? They giggle, ma'am, giggle! I never saw a woman yet—

MRS. MARCY: —to beguile the hours with merry chatter—

THE COLONEL: Chatter? Good Lord, I can't have anybody chattering—

MRS. MARCY: —and break up our dull routine with pleasure trips and parties—

THE COLONEL: Me—me go to parties? I tell you, ma'am—

MRS. MARCY [*rising and going to Dick*]: Oh, she may be a sweet young thing right out of boarding school—

THE COLONEL: Ye gods!

MRS. MARCY: As tender and fresh as a lettuce sandwich—

THE COLONEL: What—

MRS. MARCY: And you would keep him from rushing to her arms?

THE COLONEL [*striking the table a terrible blow*]: Mrs. Marcy! I want to tell you one thing, ma'am, once for all! There's not a woman living on this globe, fate or no fate, name or no name, whom I would tolerate for one moment in this house, except— [*He stops, he gasps, his jaw drops. She turns slowly and looks at him.*]

As if in a dream, held in the spell of an epoch-making idea, he approaches her.] Mrs. Marcy—what is your name?

MRS. MARCY: My name? [*She takes a stitch or two on her work, her face blank.*] My name is—Hazel.

DICK: Hazel?

THE COLONEL: Hazel?

DICK [*louder*]: Hazel!

THE COLONEL [*still louder*]: Hazel!

BOTH [*very loud*]: Hazel—

TOGETHER [*shouting*]: Hazel Nuttz!

[*The crocheting falls from her hands, which the Colonel clutches. Dick, with a whoop of delight, bursts into a roar of laughter.*]

DICK: Hazel Nuttz—by Jove, Hazel Nuttz! Oh, I say, that's—that's—HaHaHa! Hazel Nuttz! I wanted to go off looking for a woman who—and all the time—oh, by Jove, that's—HaHaHa! I say, uncle, it's hazelnuts for you, peanuts for her and—

[For the first time he looks at the two, and sounds die on his lips. The pair are as utterly unconscious of his presence as if he were even then in Florida. The Colonel's hands have clasped hers, slipped to her elbows, her shoulders, drawn her close; and they are gazing into each other's eyes like two new creatures in a just-created world.]
—and pecans for me!

[Open-mouthed, he backs off toward the door, trips over his belongings on the floor, picks them up, and backs off again.]

THE COLONEL: Darling!

DICK *[disgusted]*: The old nut head! *[Exit, bag and baggage.]*

THE COLONEL: And to think I have loved you for ten years—and didn't know it!

MRS. MARCY: But I knew it—Percy.

She lays her head on his shoulder and

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 016 103 428 9